

August 21, 2005

How NASA Plans to Retire the Shuttle

To the Editor:

Re "Mismanaging the Shuttle Fixes" (editorial, Aug. 19):

Terminating the shuttle program abruptly, while attractive from some points of view, carries with it grave consequences for the United States' pre-eminence in space and would be devastating to the work force necessary to conduct any future human spaceflight program.

In the same way, the decision to build the International Space Station with its present partnership arrangements was made more than a decade ago, and that decision, too, carries with it major consequences and obligations not lightly dismissed.

Accordingly, to fly out the shuttle program in a disciplined fashion, we should use the remaining flights for the purpose that the shuttle is most suited to: completing the International Space Station. We also hope to conduct a final Hubble servicing mission, if that proves feasible.

This is the best NASA can do for the country, given where we are today. But we will no longer adhere to a plan requiring a fixed number of shuttle flights. We are executing a program that proceeds with all deliberate speed toward retirement of the fleet in 2010.

We have carefully reconsidered the station assembly sequence, and if we use the shuttle fleet in a disciplined, measured fashion over the next five years, we can essentially complete that assembly. We can meet our obligations to our international partners and effect a transition to the shuttle's successor in a planned, orderly fashion.

With the shuttle's replacement, we can begin using the station more fully than in the years in which it was being assembled and can then focus on building the additional systems needed for America's return to the Moon.

Michael Griffin
NASA Administrator
Washington, Aug. 19, 2005